

The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)’s Representation Gaps: Regional Equity in Global Political and Economic Governance

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ABSTRACT

This research evaluates the effectiveness of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)’s membership structure in ensuring equitable global representation using mixed methods combining quantitative surveys (n=90) with qualitative expert interviews (n=4). Findings reveal only 6.9% of respondents rated regional distribution as “Very Fair”, with Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) perceived by 43.2% and 26.1%, respectively, facing greatest representation challenges. Resource disparities – political power dynamics (43.2%) and financial constraints (34.1%) – significantly impact representation quality beyond formal membership allocations. These findings have significant implications for multilateral governance frameworks, demonstrating that formal institutional equality does not guarantee substantive influence. The representation gaps identified threaten the legitimacy of global economic governance structures and may accelerate the shift toward alternative multilateral arrangements that better reflect contemporary power distributions. The analysis exposes a critical institutional paradox; while ECOSOC’s regional framework provides basic geographical coverage, its distribution formula remained static for five decades despite fundamental shifts in global economic power. Geographical proximity does not translate into political cohesion, with varying regional coordination effectiveness impacting substantive influence. Three reforms are proposed: (1) Recalibrating regional seat distribution; (2) Implementing resource equalization mechanisms; and (3) Establishing enhanced regional coordination frameworks. The research explores Malaysia’s 2025 ASEAN Chairmanship as a model to strengthen trilateral cooperation between the Association of the Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the ECOSOC. Despite implementation barriers – political will (90%) and member state disagreements (70%) – these reforms would enhance ECOSOC’s legitimacy and inclusivity. The findings contribute to institutional design literature for multilateral reform efforts, including the ongoing 2024 Summit of the Future emphasizing ECOSOC reform for achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Keywords: ECOSOC reform; Regional representation; Global governance; Institutional legitimacy; Asian political economy; Multilateral institutions

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1. INTRODUCTION

International organizations serve as fundamental mechanisms for coordinating the state-based international system, particularly within economic and social governance. The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) established as one of the six principal UN organs in 1945, functions as the primary forum for addressing international economic and social issues and developing policy recommendations for the UN system (United Nations, 1945). ECOSOC's composition includes 54 UN Member States elected by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) for overlapping three-year terms, with membership having expanded from the original 18 members through UN Charter amendments in 1965 and 1974 (Aeschlimann, 2021). The current seat distribution allocates 14 seats to the African Group (AG), 13 seats to the Western European and Other Group (WEOG), 11 seats to the Asia-Pacific Group (APG), 10 seats to the Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC) and 6 seats to the Eastern European Group (EEG) (United Nations <https://ecosoc.un.org/en/about-us/members>) – a formula established decades ago that has remained largely unchanged despite significant shifts in global demographics and economic power.

Despite extensive literature on UN representation (Daws et al., 1999; Weiss, 2010), a critical gap remains in understanding how ECOSOC's formal representation structures translate into substantive influence across different regional groupings and development categories. Existing studies focus predominantly on United Nations Security Council (UNSC) reform or general UN representation principles, leaving ECOSOC's specific challenges underexplored. While having an active agenda coordinating 14 specialized agencies, 8 functional commissions and 5 regional commissions, ECOSOC faces mounting questions about whether its membership structure adequately represents contemporary global realities (Christensen, 2023; Oguno & Nzute, 2019). The principle of equitable geographical representation has been fundamental to UN legitimacy since 1945 (Daws et al., 1999; Gould & Rablen, 2013). However, ECOSOC's structure predominantly reflects the world of the 1960s-1970s rather than 21st century realities. While global economic power has shifted dramatically – with nations once labeled as developing, such as Brazil, China, India and others, now holding considerable power – ECOSOC's regional distribution formula has remained largely unchanged despite periodic functional reforms (Momani, 2013).

This institutional stagnation occurs amid calls for more democratic, inclusive and effective global governance. The development agenda has evolved from a primary focus on economic growth to embracing the comprehensive framework embodied in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (Geneva, United Nations, 2020) (Thérien & Pouliot, 2020), encompassing social, environmental, and economic dimensions. Simultaneously, technological advancements have enhanced global connectivity meanwhile emerging challenges – climate change, health crises, migration and digital transformation (Gostin & Friedman, 2020) – have redefined international cooperation requirements.

Against this backdrop, this research investigates how ECOSOC's membership framework adequately represents contemporary global realities across regional and socioeconomic dimensions. Specifically, the study examines stakeholder perceptions of representation fairness, analyzes resource and coordination disparities that mediate actual influence and identifies reform pathways for enhancing institutional legitimacy. Through mixed-methods analysis combining quantitative surveys (n=90) with qualitative expert interviews (n=4), this research provides empirical evidence on ECOSOC representation challenges and potential solution.

1.1 Research Problem and Significance

This research investigates whether ECOSOC's current membership framework adequately guarantees fair and equitable representation across global regions and socioeconomic backgrounds. The study examines potential reforms that could improve representation for underrepresented regions and economic groups while acknowledging practical implementation challenges within a complex multilateral setting.

The research addresses a critical gap in understanding how formal representation structures translate into substantive influence within international economic governance (Christensen, 2023; Oguno & Nzute, 2019). As emerging economies increasingly pursue alternative multilateral arrangements – including BRICS (Momani, 2013), the Group of 77 and traditional UN institutions such as the ECOSOC

faces growing pressure to demonstrate continued relevance through meaningful reform (Global Policy Forum, 2006; Weiss, 2010). From a political governance viewpoint, this research examines how formal representation structures interact with informal power dynamics across different regional groupings within ECOSOC. The study contributes to political governance literature by analyzing institutional design effects on representation outcomes, specifically investigating why some regional groups achieve greater coordination effectiveness than others. This institutional comparison reveals how geographical proximity does not automatically translate into political cohesion, challenging assumptions about regional representation in international organizations (Daws et al., 1999; Talmon, 2009).

This analysis holds particular significance for Asia-Pacific nations, which despite representing over half the global population, may face systematic underrepresentation within current structures (Panke, 2013; Thirlwell, 2009). The research explores how Malaysia's 2025 ASEAN Chairmanship could serve as a vehicle for improved regional coordination approaches (Jeshurun, 2008), potentially providing a template for wider institutional modernization. From a political governance perspective, this research contributes to understanding how institutional design affects representation outcomes across different regional groupings, offering insights into the relationship between formal rules and actual political influence in multilateral settings. Beyond institutional legitimacy, ECOSOC reforms have direct implications for national and regional policy coordination. Enhanced regional representation mechanisms could strengthen the alignment between ECOSOC recommendations and national development plans, particularly LDCs and SIDS, while improved coordination frameworks would enable regional organizations like ASEAN to more effectively channel member state priorities into global economic governance processes.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

ECOSOC's representation challenges exist within broader debates about equity and effectiveness in global governance. The following review examines literature of ECOSOC representation challenges across the following dimensions:

2.1 Theoretical Foundations of International Representation

The concept of equitable representation in international organizations rests on theories of institutional legitimacy and democratic governance. Several scholars provide foundational analysis linking representation to institutional credibility (Daws et al., 2019; Gould & Rablen, 2013), arguing that widening gaps between aspirations and performance jeopardize UN's legitimacy (Daws et al., 1999, section vi, p.46). This perspective connects to broader debates about democratic deficits in global governance, where institutions created in different historical contexts struggle to maintain relevance amid changing power distributions (Rittberger et al., 2019; Weiss, 2013).

Academic analysis offers important insights into geographical representation in non-plenary bodies, noting "that regional groupings aim to ensure diverse viewpoints in smaller deliberative organs" (Schermers & Blokker, 2018, p.216-217). However, their analysis raises questions about diversity within regions – a concern particularly relevant to ECOSOC's large and heterogeneous regional groups. These theoretical frameworks establish that representation encompasses more than formal seat allocation – it requires examining actual influence, resource capacity and coordination effectiveness. While this literature provides conceptual tools for analyzing representation, it rarely addresses ECOSOC specifically. The next section examines studies that does focus on ECOSOC, revealing how theoretical representation ideals translate into this particular institutional context.

2.2 Critiques of ECOSOC's Representation Structure

Academic research has increasingly scrutinized ECOSOC's representation framework. Talmon (2009, p.45) identifies "significant inequalities between and within existing regional groups with the Western European and Other Group (WEOG) over-represented compared to developing states". This empirical foundation supports concerns about structural imbalances affecting representation quality. Weiss (2010, p.1-3; 2013 p.127) offers perhaps the most comprehensive critique of ECOSOC's effectiveness, arguing that membership expansion from 18 to 54 members between 1965-1973 brought

symbolic rather than substantive representation improvements. His identification of the “North-South quagmire” as preventing meaningful dialogue highlights how formal representation equality can mask substantive inequality. Weiss advocates for “issues-based and interest-based negotiations” moving beyond conventional geographical classifications – a perspective that informs this research’s exploration of development-based representation alternatives.

Recent analysis by Oguno and Nzute (2019, p.32-36) demonstrates how economic power significantly influences representation in UN bodies, creating what they term a “two-tier system” where formal membership equality conceals substantial influence disparities. Their finding that proposed representation reforms often reinforce rather than alleviate existing power dynamics underscores implementation challenges examined in this research. The literature establishes that ECOSOC has faced persistent critiques regarding both structural representation and operational effectiveness. However, these critiques largely focus on formal institutional arrangements – seat distributions, voting procedures, mandate scope – without systematically examining how economic power disparities and coordination challenges mediate representation outcomes. The political economy literature reviewed next provides analytical frameworks for understanding these deeper structural dynamics that shape representation beyond formal rules.

2.3 Political Economy of ECOSOC Membership

Understanding why states compete for ECOSOC membership despite perceived limitations requires examining tangible and intangible benefits that membership confers. Luck (2003, p.11-18) argues that even UN bodies with limited formal power serve as critical “nodes of influence” for shaping normative frameworks and building diplomatic coalitions. For developing nations, ECOSOC provides strategic advantages including access to development financing discussions, participation in norm-setting processes and enhanced diplomatic status.

However, these benefits are unevenly distributed, creating what Stone (2011, p.1) identifies as the “participation paradox” – formal membership equality that masks substantial inequalities in actual influence. Without adequate resources and institutional capacity, formal membership may not translate into meaningful influence, particularly for the constituencies most needing ECOSOC’s development coordination functions. Political economy analyses reveal how formal institutional equality can mask substantial disparities in actual influence, shaped by resource asymmetries and coordination capacity. These theoretical insights apply broadly to international organizations but remain underexplored in ECOSOC contexts. Moreover, this literature typically centers Western or Global South perspectives generally with limited attention to regional dynamics within the developing world. The Asian governance literature reviewed next addresses this gap which offered perspectives from a region representing 60% of global population yet systematically underrepresented in global economic institutions.

2.4 Asian Perspectives on Global Economic Governance

The Asian context adds crucial dimensions to ECOSOC representation questions. The rise of Asian economies has been accompanied by calls for greater representation in international economic institutions, reflecting broader shifts in global economic gravity (Momani, 2013; Thirlwell, 2009). More recent scholarship examines how COVID-19 economic disruptions accelerated Asian regional cooperation initiatives, strengthening regional value chains and institutional coordination mechanisms (Asian Development Bank, 2021, p.45-67; Kimura & Chen, 2022, p.214-218), and how the Belt and Road Initiatives has reshaped multilateral institutional preferences among Asian states (Jones & Hameiri, 2020, p.8-12).

Previous study demonstrates how countries like Brazil, India and South Africa, eventually becoming the founder of BRICS, have strategically leveraged multilateral participation to legitimize claims for greater representation in global economic governance (Nel & Stephen, 2010, p.72). The 2023-2024 BRICS expansion to include Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE demonstrate accelerating dissatisfaction with traditional multilateral representation structures and the appeal of alternative institutional arrangements that offer more equitable decision-making processes (Cooper & Flemes, 2024, p.95-100; Stuenkel, 2023, p.145-168). For ASEAN specifically, collective action within international institutions has been a key strategy for amplifying individual member state influence. Malaysia’s approach to multilateral engagement, documented by Jeshurun (2008, p.110),

demonstrates how middle powers can leverage institutional positions to advance regional interests while building credentials for broader global governance participation.

The literature reviewed reveals three interconnected gaps that this research addresses: First, while scholars have identified representation inequalities in UN bodies generally (Gould & Rablen, 2013; Talmon, 2009), ECOSOC-specific analysis remains limited. Second, existing critiques focus primarily on formal seat distribution (Weiss, 2010) without examining how resource disparities and coordination effectiveness mediate actual influence. Third, despite growing attention to Asia's role in global governance (Momani, 2013; Thirlwell, 2009), systematic analysis of regional coordination challenges within ECOSOC's APG is lacking. This research bridges these gaps through mixed-methods analysis combining stakeholder perceptions with institutional dynamics across regional groupings.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This research employs a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data concurrently before integration for interpretation. This approach provides comprehensive understanding of complex representation dynamics within ECOSOC's institutional framework while enabling validation of findings through cross-verification between methods. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation across key dimensions. For the survey, inclusion criteria required: (a) UN-related experience of any kind; (b) Direct or substantive ECOSOC engagement; and (c) Familiarity with ECOSOC operations. The sample was stratified by professional background (diplomats, academics, NGO representatives, international organization staff) and regional representation (all five UN regional groups). Interview participants were selected based on direct ECOSOC decision-making experience (presidency, bureau membership or delegation leadership), diverse regional perspectives (developed and developing nations) and varied institutional positions.

3.2 Data Collection

Quantitative component: A structured questionnaire was distributed to 221 diplomats, 233 government officials, 75 academics and 142 NGO representatives with ECOSOC experience. The survey period extended from late January through March 2025, yielding 90 completed responses (exceeding the target of 80). The questionnaire consisted of 25 questions across six sections namely respondent information, fairness of current structure, effectiveness of representation, integration and coordination, reform priorities and regional cooperation opportunities. The questionnaire is appended as Attachment 1.

Qualitative component: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four key informants possessing direct ECOSOC experience: (1) A Malaysian Ambassador with experience during Malaysia's 2010 ECOSOC presidency; (2) A Nepalese diplomatic representative with UN experience in New York; (3) A UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) Secretary with 15 years of regional commission experience; and (4) A Japanese Foreign Ministry official (speaking in personal capacity). Interviews were conducted between February to March 2025 through various modes based on participants availability. The interview question is appended as Attachment 2.

Validity and reliability were ensured through: (a) Triangulation of quantitative survey patterns with qualitative interview insights to strengthen construct validity; (b) Expert validation through participant review of interview transcripts for accuracy; and (c) Internal consistency checks within survey responses, with contradictory patterns flagged for review. Of the 90 survey respondents, 64 (71.6%) were from the APG, including respondents from ASEAN Member States. While this provides some foundation for analyzing ASEAN perspectives, the sample size prevents drawing definitive conclusions about ASEAN consensus on specific reform proposals.

3.3 Analytical Framework

The analysis integrates statistical patterns from survey responses with contextual insights from expert interviews. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify patterns in stakeholder perceptions, while qualitative interviews underwent thematic analysis to illuminate institutional dynamics affecting representation. The convergent design enables triangulation of findings while providing both breadth and depth in understanding representation challenges. This analytical approach is illustrated in figure 1.

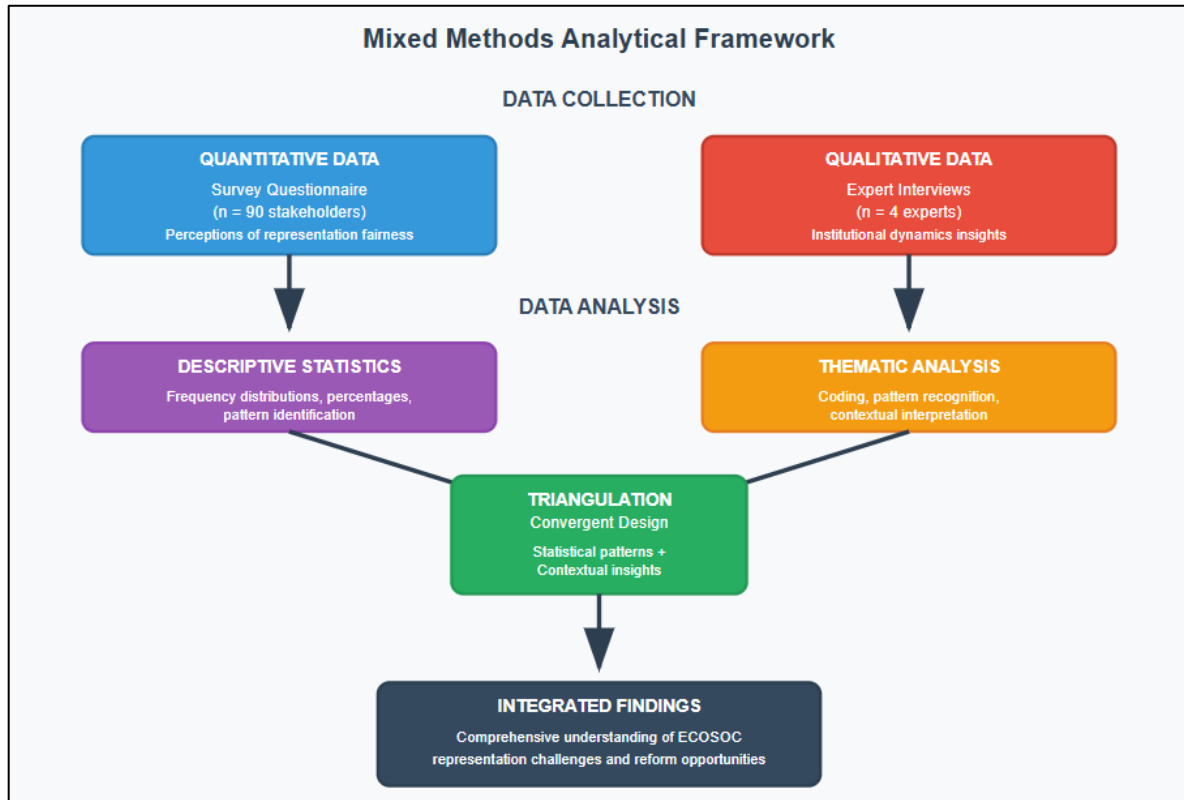


Figure 1: Framework Logic – Parallel collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data followed by convergent integration to provide both breadth and depth in understanding representation effectiveness.

3.4 Research Limitation

This research has several limitations. The research sample exhibits potential selection bias that may influence findings. Respondents with direct ECOSOC experience (38.6% of the sample) may disproportionately favored procedural and institutional reforms over more fundamental restructuring, given their familiarity with existing mechanisms and investment in current processes. This experiential bias could partially explain the strong support for capacity-building programs (90%), financial support mechanisms (88%) and technical assistance (87%) – reforms that enhance participation within existing structures rather than challenging fundamental power distributions. Conversely, stakeholders without direct ECOSOC engagement may hold different priorities emphasizing more radical structural changes. As such, future research should stratify samples to compare perspectives of ECOSOC participants versus non-participants, and examine whether proximity to institutional processes correlates with preference for incremental versus transformative reform.

The sample size (n=90) represents a small fraction of stakeholders in an organization serving 193 UN Member States. While diverse, larger and more regionally balanced samples (n=300-500), with stratified sampling proportionate representation across all regional groups and development categories, including deliberate oversampling of LDCs and SIDS to ensure their perspectives would enhance

generalizability. The study relies primarily on perception-based assessments rather than quantitative outcome metrics of representation effectiveness. Future study could use systematic analysis of ECOSOC voting records across multiple sessions to empirically examine whether regional groups exhibit cohesion in actual decision-making, and whether representation on formal membership correlates with influence on substantive outcomes. This could employ network analysis to map coalition patterns and identify which member states serve as brokers across regional divides.

The research did not examine representation dynamics across ECOSOC's subsidiary bodies. Each of these bodies likely exhibits distinct representation dynamics influenced by their mandate, composition, working methods and relation to ECOSOC's historical evolution reforms (1965 and 1974 expansions). Future researches could utilize a comparative institutional analysis to investigate representation patterns across the broader ECOSOC system, which would illuminate the effects of regional dynamics across its diverse entities.

4. RESULTS

The survey achieved broad stakeholder representation across regional, professional and experiential dimensions. The distribution reflects the purposive sampling strategy targeting stakeholders with substantive ECOSOC knowledge while ensuring representation across geographical and professional categories in table 1.

Table 1: Survey Respondent Demographics (n = 90*)

<i>Category</i>	<i>Sub-Category</i>	<i>Total, n</i>	<i>Percentage, %</i>
Region	African States (AG)	10	10.20
	Asia-Pacific States (APG)	64	71.60
	Eastern European States (EEG)	4	7.40
	Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC)	5	8.50
	Western European & Others (WEOG)	6	9.30
Professional Background	Diplomat/ Government Official	61	68.20
	Academic/ Researcher	9	10.20
	International Organization	4	4.20
	Civil Society / Non-Governmental Organization (NGO)	14	16.00
Un Experience	< 5 years	42	47.70
	5-10 years	26	28.40
	11-15 years	12	13.60
	15+ years	9	10.20
Direct ECOSOC Participation	Yes	34	38.60

*Some respondents chose not to answer specific questions; percentages are calculated based on valid responses for each item.

It is important to note that stakeholder perceptions of representational fairness, while analytically valuable, do not necessarily reflect objective measures of institutional imbalance. Perceptions are shaped by normative expectations, professional experiences and institutional positions that may not align with demographic or economic indicators. For instance, the 6.9% "Very Fair" rating may reflect dissatisfaction with ECOSOC's limited influence relative to other UN organs rather than purely seat distribution concerns. Nevertheless, perceptions matter significantly in international organizations, and legitimacy deficits perceived by member states and stakeholders can undermine institutional effectiveness regardless of whether formal structures meet objective equity criteria. This research treats perception data as indicators of legitimacy challenges that merit attention, while acknowledging that perception-based assessments require complementary analysis of structural and procedural dynamics.

4.1 Structural Representation Gaps

The research reveals significant regional distribution imbalances within ECOSOC's current membership structure. Only 6.9% of survey respondents rated the regional distribution as "Very Fair", with 40.2% expressing neutrality and 25.2% considering it unfair (Survey data, 2025). This ambivalence reflects stakeholder recognition that while the current structure provides basic regional representation, it inadequately reflects contemporary global realities. The data is reflected in figure 2.

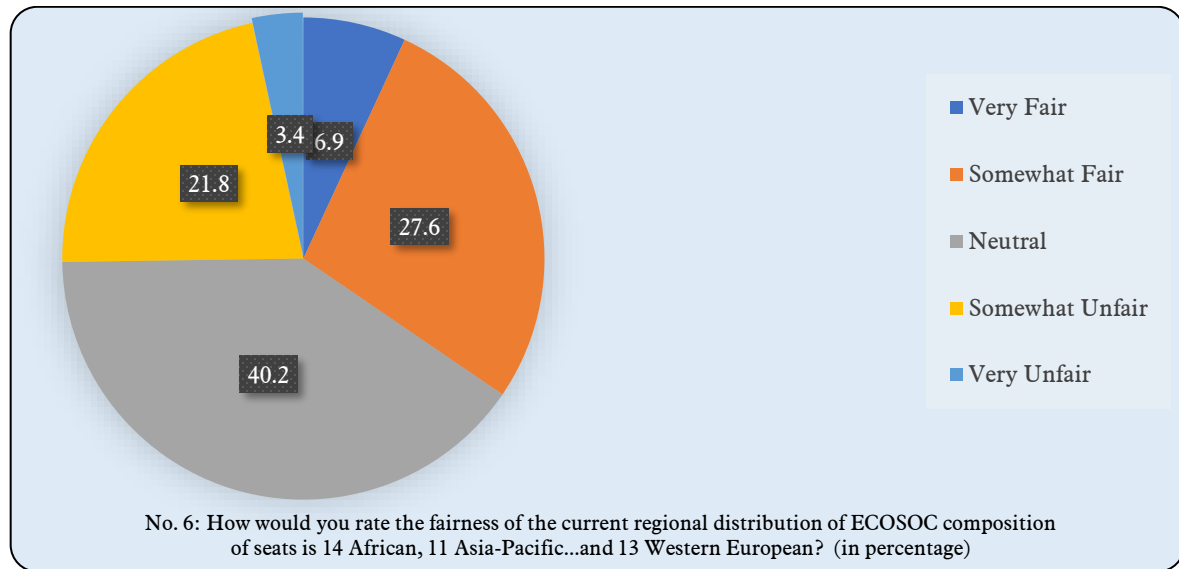


Figure 2: Fairness of Current Structure

Expert interviews confirmed these perceptions. The Malaysian Ambassador characterized voting patterns as following superpower alignments rather than regional interests (Interview with Malaysian Ambassador, 2025), while the UNESCAP Secretary stated there "should be more representation in the Asia-Pacific Group (APG) due to its vast membership and population compared to other regions" (Interview with UNESCAP Secretary, 2025). These observations align with the finding that the current distribution – 14 African Group (AG), 13 Western European and Other Group (WEOG), 11 Asia-Pacific Group (APG), 10 Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC) and 6 Eastern European Group (EEG) seats – inadequately reflects contemporary demographics and economic significance.

4.2 Socioeconomic Diversity Challenges

Beyond geographical distribution, the research identified critical gaps in representing socioeconomic diversity. Survey respondents identified LDCs (43.2%) and SIDS (26.1%) as facing greatest representation challenges. This finding was substantiated by expert observations that many developing countries lack capacity to maintain adequate permanent representation, severely limiting participation quality. The data is reflected as figure 3.

The survey indicated that current structures only moderately reflect contemporary global economic realities, with 44.3% rating this alignment at the midpoint of a five-point scale. The data is reflected as figure 4. A Japanese Foreign Ministry official (in its personal capacity) reinforced this assessment, noting "significant imbalances" particularly affecting emerging economies and small island states despite their increasing importance in global economic discussions (Interview with Japanese Foreign Ministry official (in its personal capacity), 2025).

4.3 Resource Disparities and Participation Quality

A critical finding across both survey and interview data was how resource disparities impact representation quality beyond formal membership structures. Survey respondents identified political power dynamics (43.2%) and financial resources (34.1%) as primary barriers to effective representation.

The data is reflected as figure 5. The UNESCAP Secretary elaborated that advanced economies enjoy “added advantage due to availability of budget and means to participate in all meetings” while developing nations struggle with basic representation logistics (Interview with UNESCAP Secretary, 2025).

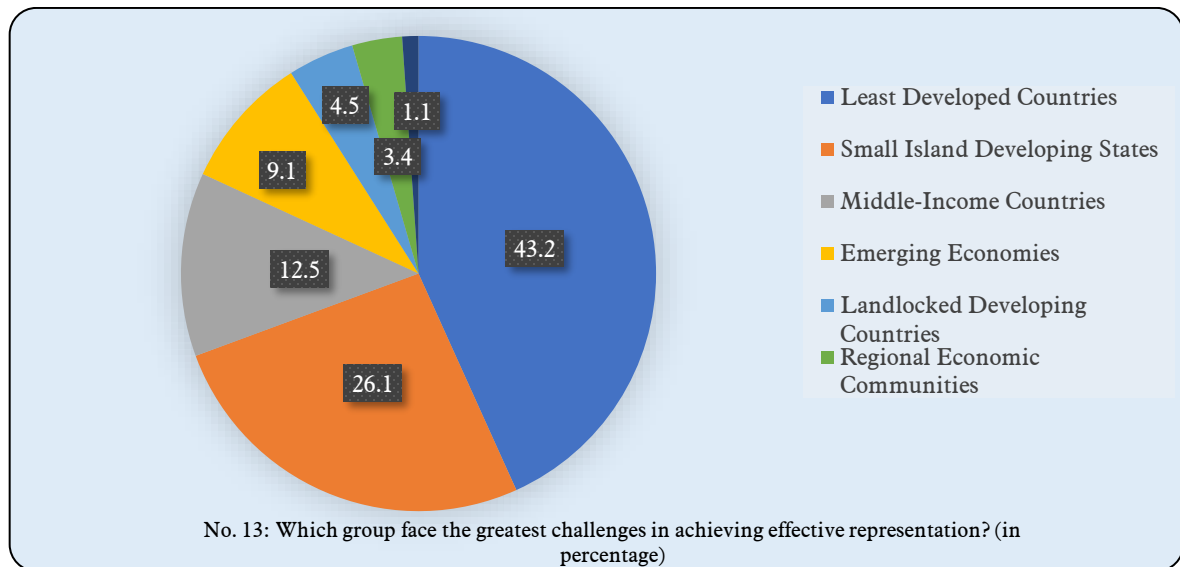


Figure 3: Effectiveness of Representation

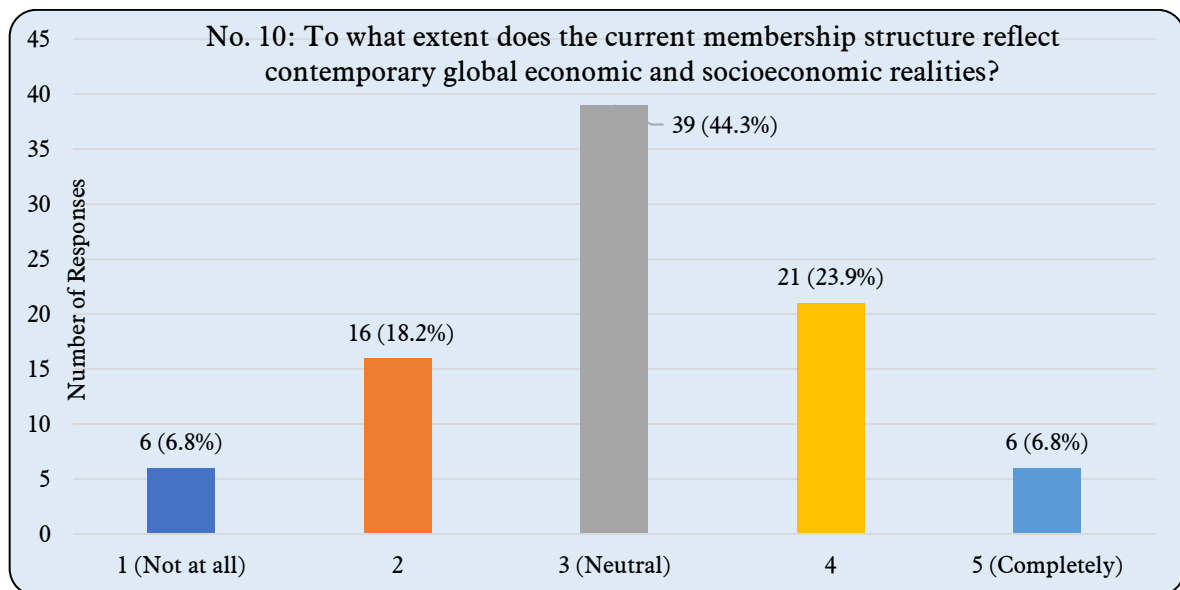


Figure 4: Fairness of Current Structure

These findings indicate that formal representation equality may be substantially undermined by participation inequalities in practice. The strong survey support for capacity building programs (90%), financial support (88%) and technical assistance (87%) reflect recognition of these practical participation barriers (Survey data, 2025). The data is reflected as figure 6.

4.4 Regional Coordination Dynamics

The research revealed significant variations in how effectively different regional groups leverage formal representation. Multiple expert interviewees observed that GRULAC and WEOG typically demonstrate greater cohesion compared to the more fragmented APG. The UNESCAP Secretary noted that among APG, only ASEAN and the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) achieve regular coordination

(Interview with UNESCAP Secretary, 2025). This internal fragmentation potentially diminishes the APG’s effective influence despite having the third-largest seat allocation¹. The former Nepalese UN representative characterized the group as having “very huge membership and divided on various issues” suggesting that formal seat allocations represent only one dimension of effective representation (Interview with former Nepalese UN official, 2025).

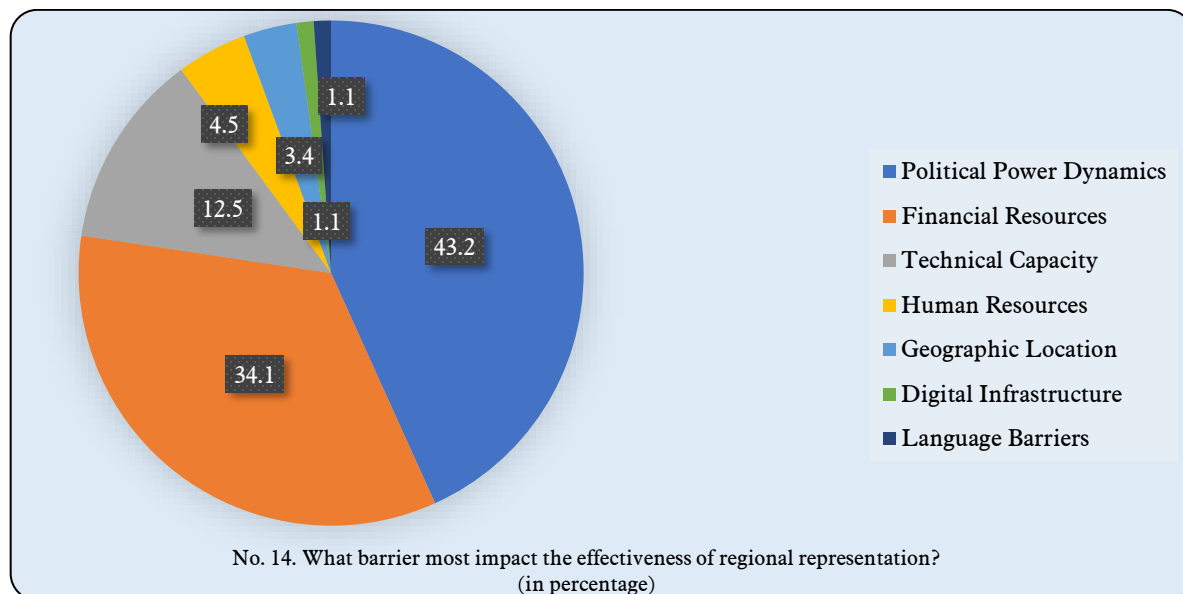


Figure 5: Effectiveness of Representation

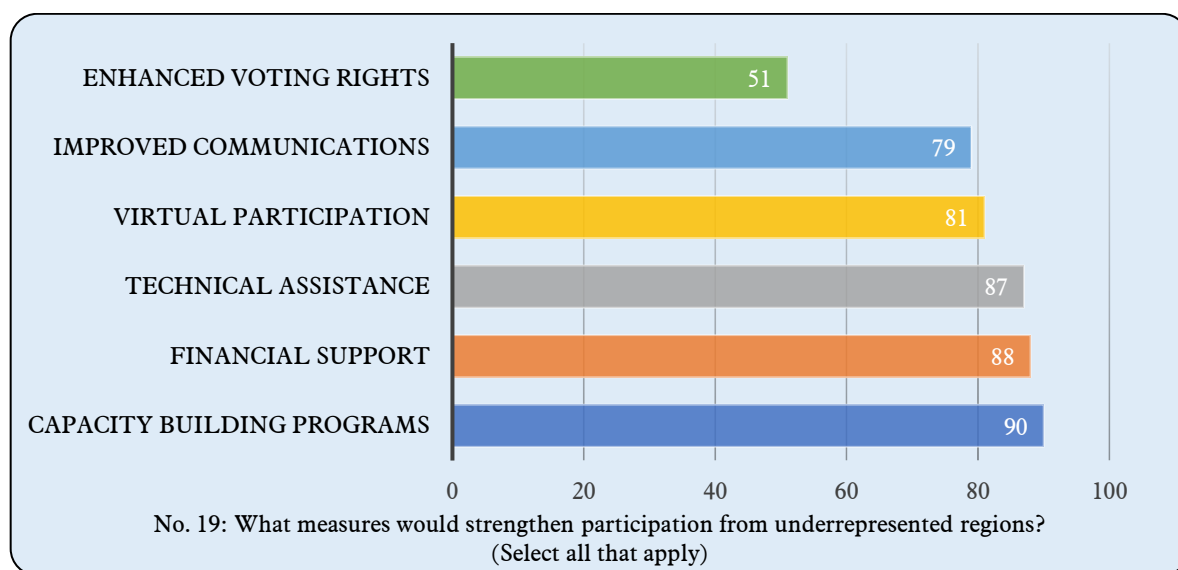


Figure 6: Reform and Improvement

4.5 Reform Priorities and Implementation Barriers

Survey respondents identified clear reform priorities: Regional Seat Distribution (30.7%) and Decision-Making Processes (28.4%) as aspects most needing reform (Survey data, 2025). The data is reflected as figure 7. Expert interviewees offered specific suggestions, with the Malaysian Ambassador

¹ ECOSOC’s current seat distribution allocates 14 seats to the African Group (AG), 13 seats to the Western European and Other Group (WEOG), 11 seats to the Asia-Pacific Group (APG), 10 seats to the Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC) and 6 seats to the Eastern European Group (EEG). The list of countries for each regional groups for the year 2025 is reflected via this link <https://ecosoc.un.org/en/about-us/members>.

proposing concrete adjustments: increasing APG representation by two seats while reducing WEOG and AG by one seat each (Interview with Malaysian Ambassador, 2025).

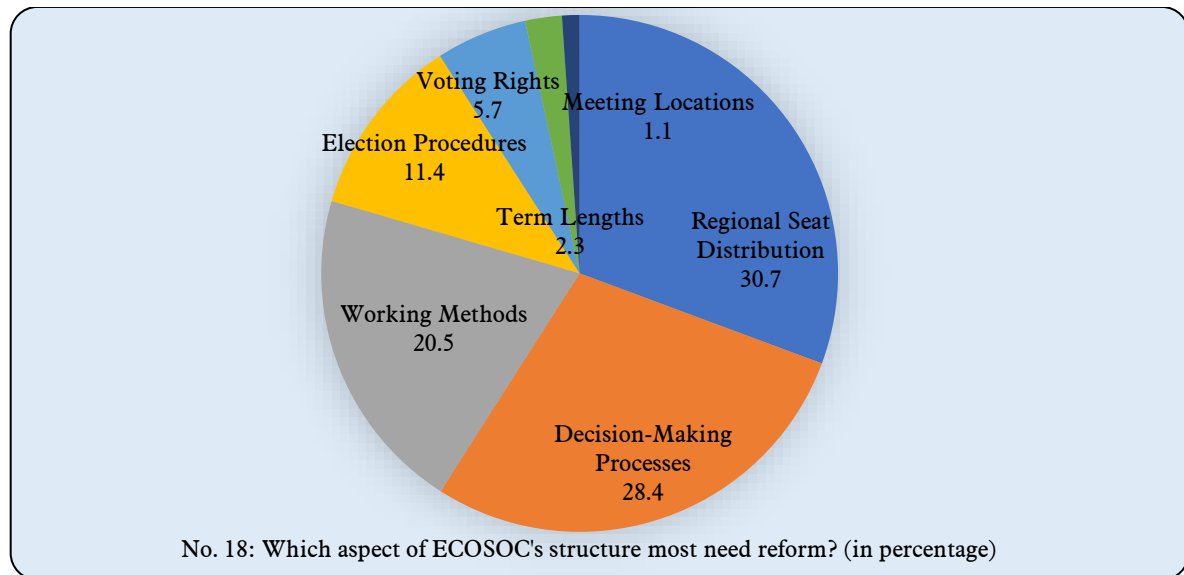


Figure 7: Reform and Improvement

However, the research also identified significant implementation barriers. Survey respondents overwhelmingly identified Political Will (90%) as the primary reform barrier, followed by Member State Disagreements (70%) and Resource Constraints (65%) (Survey data, 2025). The data is reflected as figure 8. Expert interviews confirmed these challenges, with multiple respondents acknowledging that while reforms are needed, implementation may take years due to institutional inertia and political resistance (Interviews with Malaysian Ambassador and Japanese Foreign Ministry official (in its personal capacity, 2025).

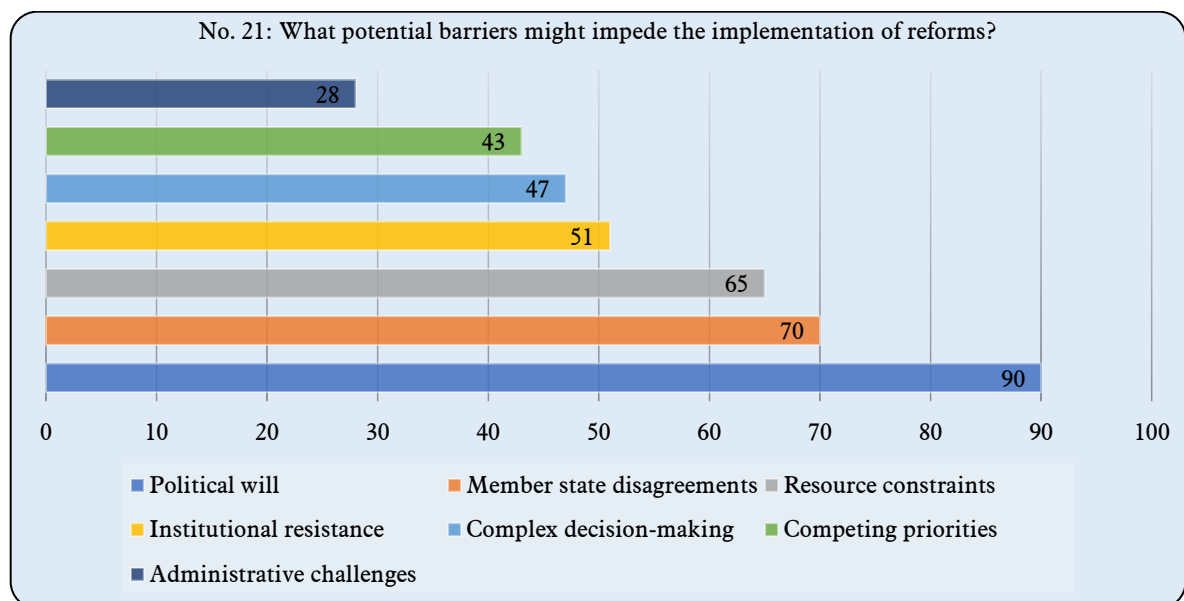


Figure 8: Section E: Reform and Improvement

4.6 Malaysia's ASEAN Chairmanship Opportunities

Regarding Malaysia's 2025 ASEAN Chairmanship, survey respondents strongly favored strengthening trilateral cooperation between ASEAN, ADB and ECOSOC (40.9%) and engaging with

high-level ECOSOC platforms, particularly the High-Level Political Forum (30.7%) and Financing for Development Forum (27.3%) (Survey data, 2025). The data is reflected as figure 9.

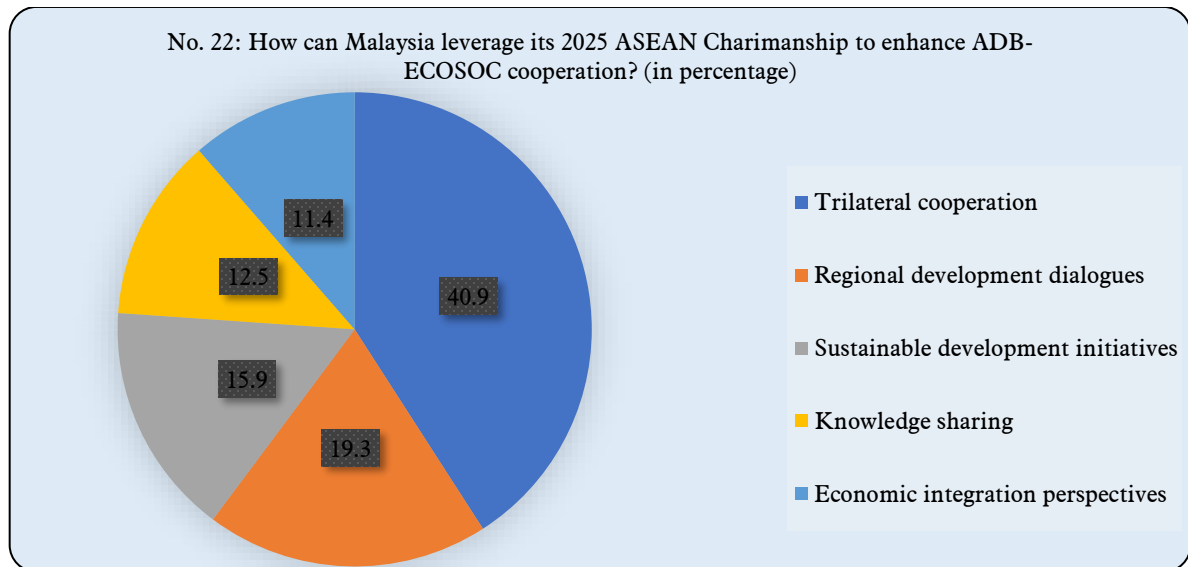


Figure 9: Section F: Regional Cooperation (Malaysia’s ASEAN Chairmanship 2025 and the ADB – ECOSOC Engagement)

Expert recommendations emphasized institutional relationship-building and leveraging ASEAN’s relative cohesion to advance regional priorities. The UNESCAP Secretary recommended focusing on areas where ASEAN and UN priorities overlap, particularly Second Committee issues (Economic and Financial Committee) where ASEAN consensus is stronger (Interviews with former Nepalese UN official and UNESCAP Secretary, 2025). The strong survey support for ASEAN-ADB-ECOSOC trilateral cooperation (40.9%) reflects broader stakeholder recognition of regional organizations’ potential role rather than specifically validated ASEAN policy preferences. The qualitative interviews with Malaysian and Japanese officials (the latter in its personal capacity) provide deeper institutional insights into ASEAN coordination possibilities, but these represent expert assessments rather than official ASEAN positions. Generalizations about Malaysia’s 2025 ASEAN Chairmanship opportunities should therefore be understood as research-based recommendations requiring validation through formal ASEAN consultation processes.

5. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

5.1 Representation Legitimacy in Global Political and Economic Governance

Only 6.9% of respondents rated regional distribution as “Very Fair”, while 25.2% considered it “Unfair” or “Very Unfair”. This low satisfaction rate indicates a significant legitimacy deficit. Research on international organizations suggests that when fewer than 15% of stakeholders rate institutional arrangements as highly fair, legitimacy concerns emerge (Gould & Rablen, 2013). This threshold matters particularly for ECOSOC, whose core purpose is equitable representation. While not an immediate crisis, this legitimacy deficit undermines ECOSOC’s relevance amid growing alternative multilateral arrangements. This finding aligns with Oguno & Nzute’s (2019, p.32-36) identification of a “two-tier system” in UN representation, where formal equality masks substantial influence disparities. Similarly, Christensen (2023) argues that ECOSOC faces fundamental effectiveness questions. The low satisfaction rates (6.9%) echo Weiss’s (2010, p.1-3) critique that ECOSOC’s membership expansion brought symbolic rather than substantive improvements.

This legitimacy deficit must be understood within broader shifts in international political economy. The rise of alternative multilateral arrangements – including BRICS, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and strengthened South-South cooperation mechanisms – reflects growing

dissatisfaction with traditional UN structures. These parallel institutions offer developing nations greater voice and more equitable decision-making processes, directly challenging ECOSOC's relevance. The concentration of representation challenges among LDCs (43.2%) and SIDS (26.1%) is particularly problematic from a political economy perspective (Survey data, 2025). These are precisely the constituencies that most need effective international coordination for development – yet they face the greatest barriers to meaningful participation.

The urgency of the 2024 Summit of the Future's Pact for the Future, which explicitly calls for revitalizing ECOSOC's coordination role. This high-level commitment provides a strategic momentum for addressing representation gaps identified in this research. Rather than pursuing standalone ECOSOC reforms that face resistance, integrating representation movements within the broader UN reform agenda endorsed by UN Member States may prove more politically feasible. This momentum aligns with the Global Policy Forum's (2006) earlier calls for ECOSOC reform and Luck's (2003, p.11-18) argument that even limited UN bodies serve as critical 'nodes of influence' for shaping normative frameworks.

5.2 Structural Inequities and Economic Power Dynamics

Survey respondents highlighted political power imbalances and resource constraints demonstrating that meaningful participation requires more than formal membership. This finding aligns with critical political economy analyses of international institutions. The "participation paradox" identified in the literature – where formal membership equality conceals substantial influence disparities – is clearly evident in ECOSOC dynamics. Advanced economies maintain consistent representation through well-resourced permanent missions while developing nations' struggle to cover participation costs, confirming (a) Stone's (2011, p.1) theoretical framework, which identifies how formal membership equality conceals substantial inequalities in actual influence; (b) Panke (2013) demonstration of similar dynamics in the UNGA, where unequal actors struggle within supposedly equalizing institutions; (c) Cooper and Shaw's (2009) analysis of small state vulnerabilities in multilateral settings; and (d) Keohane's (1969, p.291-310) seminal work on 'Lilliputians' Dilemmas' anticipated these exact challenges faced by smaller states in international politics.

Addressing resource disparities involve choosing between universal capacity support (promoting equity across all member states) and targeted assistance to the most disadvantaged (maximizing efficiency of limited resources). Universal approaches – such as standardized travel support or technical assistance program ensure broad buy-in but may dilute impact. Targeted mechanisms focused on LDCs and SIDS address the most acute needs but risk creating new hierarchies and resistance from middle-income countries also facing constraints. The suggestion by the Malaysian Ambassador that representation could be organized around development status rather than geographical grouping offers an intriguing alternative that might better reflect contemporary political economy realities. Such an approach would acknowledge that countries' economic development levels often provide better predictors of their international economic interests than geographical proximity. This alternative approach builds on Gould & Rablen (2013) theoretical work on equitable representation in UN bodies, which questions whether geographical criteria adequately reflect contemporary realities.

5.3 Regional Dynamics and Collective Action Challenges

GRULAC and WEOG groupings demonstrate greater cohesion than the APG despite APG's demographic significance (representing 60% of global population). For the APG specifically, the diversity spanning from least developed countries to advanced economies, combined with significant political and cultural differences, creates inherent collective action challenges. The Nepalese representative's example of Nepal's progressive social positions aligning more closely with WEOG than other APG illustrates how geographical groupings may inadequately capture value and policy similarities (Interview with former Nepalese UN official, 2025). The variation in regional cohesion supports Malone's (2000, p.3-23) findings about differential coordination effectiveness among regional groups in UNSC elections. Talmon (2009, p.45) previously identified similar inequalities between regional groups, particularly noting WEOG's over-representation compared to developing states. The Nepal example aligning more with WEOG than APG illustrates Talmon's (2009) argument for moving beyond geographical regionalism toward value-

based groupings. This finding also resonates with Nel & Stephen's (2010, p.1-22) analysis of how regional powers in the developing world face coordination challenges that limit their multilateral effectiveness.

Improving APG coordination effectiveness faces a tension between maintaining inclusive geographical representation and creating more cohesive sub-regional mechanisms. Formalizing sub-regional caucuses – such as ASEAN, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)² or Central Asia – within APG structures could enhance coordination while maintaining broader regional identity. However, these risks creating new hierarchies where economically stronger sub-regions dominate weaker ones, or where states excluded from cohesive sub-groupings become further marginalized.

5.4 ASEAN's Potential Role in Institutional Reform

Survey respondents strongly supported (40.9%) ASEAN-ADB-ECOSOC trilateral cooperation as a mechanism for enhanced regional coordination. This approach aligns with emerging trends toward “networked multilateralism” that complement rather than replace traditional UN structures (Thérien & Pouliot's, 2020, p.612-636). The potential for ASEAN-ADB-ECOSOC cooperation reflects broader trends identified by Barnett (1995) regarding partnerships between the UN and regional organizations in governance functions while Jeshurun's (2008, p.110) analysis of Malaysia's diplomatic approach demonstrates how middle powers can leverage institutional positions to advance regional interests, supporting the strategic opportunity identified in this research.

While ASEAN demonstrates relative cohesion compared to the broader APG, this unity varies significantly across issue areas. ASEAN achieves stronger consensus on: (a) Economic integration and trade facilitation; (b) ASEAN-centric institutional frameworks (ASEAN Plus Three (APT))³, East Asia Summit⁴ (EAS)); (c) Sustainable development financing aligned with national development priorities; and (4) Procedural matters in multilateral forums. However, ASEAN cohesion weakens considerably regarding: (1) Security and strategic issues where member states maintain divergent great power relationships; (2) Human rights and governance norms where the ‘ASEAN Way’ of non-interference limits unified positions; (3) Climate change mitigation commitments where development priorities differ substantially between countries in ASEAN; and (4) South China Sea territorial disputes. The UNESCAP Secretary's observation that ASEAN achieves regular coordination specifically refers to economic and development issues – precisely the areas where ECOSOC engagement would occur. Malaysia's 2025 Chairmanship should therefore focus ECOSOC trilateral cooperation on these consensus-strong areas (particularly Second Committee economic issues) rather than assuming ASEAN can leverage broader cohesion.

The research also reveals realistic constraints on ASEAN's capacity to drive broader systemic change. The mixed expert assessments of ASEAN's potential influence reflect both the organization's achievements in regional coordination and its limitations in global agenda-setting. As Jordaan's (2003, p.165-181) distinction between emerging and traditional middle powers suggests, ASEAN's influence may be constrained by broader power dynamics regardless of coordination improvements. Moreover, Cox (1981, p.126-155) identifies as tensions between state-based international systems and evolving global power structures suggests ECOSOC's problems are symptomatic of broader global governance challenges that regional solutions alone cannot resolve. While ASEAN-ADB-ECOSOC cooperation offers a promising pilot, its ultimate success depends on whether improvements in one regional group's coordination create demonstration effects that encourage broader systemic reforms – or whether they simply create another tier in an increasingly fragmented multilateral landscape.

² The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is an economic and political regional organization of countries in South Asia that aims to accelerate cooperation, combat disasters and promote economic development in South Asia. While SAARC is still technically active, it has been largely dormant due to geopolitical conflict between India and Pakistan and the situation in Afghanistan. SAARC has 8 members namely Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

³ ASEAN Plus Three (APT) consist of ten ASEAN Member States, China, Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK). The APT has evolved as the main vehicle to promote cooperation between ASEAN and the East Asian Community. APT has continued to deepened cooperation in a wide range of areas including political-security, trade and investment, finance, energy, tourism, agriculture and forestry, environment, education, health, culture and arts, among others.

⁴ East Asia Summit (EAS) is a regional forum held annually by leaders of ASEAN, East Asian and Indo-Pacific countries discussing political, security and economic challenges facing the region. The EAS has 19 members namely the 10 ASEAN countries, Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, ROK, Russian Federation and the USA. The EAS plays vital role in advancing regional cooperation in many areas.

6. REFORM PROPOSALS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Structural Reform: Development-Based Representation

Based on the research findings, this paper proposes a comprehensive three-pillar reform approach that addresses structural, procedural and coordination deficiencies in ECOSOC's representation framework. The structural reform component involves establishing a hybrid representation model combining geographical and development-based criteria, beginning with immediate seat recalibration – increasing APG representation by two seats while WEOG and AG representation by one seat each to better reflect contemporary demographics and economic significance. This would be complemented by longer-term development-based representation criteria ensuring adequate representation for LDCs, SIDS, middle-income countries and emerging economies across all regional groups, responding to widespread recognition that LDCs and SIDS encounter the most severe participation barriers. Implementation would proceed through a time-bound Reform Working Group with balanced regional representation and a 24-month mandate to develop concrete recommendations aligned with ongoing UN reform processes.

To expand the membership of the ECOSOC via the UN Charter, Article 61⁵ must be formally amended through the process outlined in Article 108⁶. This rigorous procedure requires widespread agreement from both the UNGA and the broader UN membership, specifically including all five permanent members of the UNSC (China, France, Russian Federation, UK and USA). This extraordinarily high threshold has been achieved only twice (1965 and 1974 amendments) reflecting intense political difficulty. Nevertheless, the 2024 Summit of the Future creates political momentum by explicitly calling for ECOSOC revitalization, potentially a strategic window for reform discussions. The specific seat recalibration proposal derives from multiple factors rather than a single metric that would include (a) Population Representation – APG represents 60% of global population but holds only 20.4% of ECOSOC seats (11/54), suggesting substantial underrepresentation. Increasing to 13 seats (24%) partially addresses this gap while remaining politically feasible; Economic significance – APG accounts for approximately 40% of global domestic product (GDP), yet this economic weight is not reflected in current allocations where WEOG (24% of seats) represents roughly 30% of global GDP; and (c) The APG has grown significantly since the 1974 seat allocation, now comprising 53 UN Member States compared to 28 in WEOG, yet seat allocation has not adjusted proportionally.

6.2 Procedural Reform: Resource Equalization

The procedural reform pillar addresses resource disparities identified as fundamental barriers to effective participation through systematic capacity-building programs (supported by 90% of respondents), dedicated funding mechanisms for participation costs including travel and personnel expenses and technical assistance systems for document preparation and position development that advanced economies typically handle through well-resourced permanent missions. These measures directly respond to the finding that financial resources represent 34.1% of representation barriers while political power dynamics account for 43.2%.

6.3 Coordination Reform: Enhanced Regional Frameworks

The coordination reform component establishes enhanced regional frameworks through formalized regular regional consultations (preferred by 40.9% of respondents) with dedicated secretariat support, digital coordination platforms that reduce costs while improving communication quality, and pre-session coordination funding for regional groups to conduct thorough consultation processes. This addresses the observation that only ASEAN and the PIF maintain consistent coordination within the fragmented APG, potentially diminishing the APG's effective influence despite having the third-largest seat allocation.

⁵Article 61 explicitly defines the composition of ECOSOC and the process for electing its members.

⁶Article 108 lays out the formal, two-stage procedure for amending the UN Charter which mandates: (a) Two-thirds majority vote in the UNGA; and (b) Ratification by two-thirds of UN Member States.

6.4 Pilot Project: ASEAN-ADB-ECOSOC Trilateral Cooperation

Malaysia's 2025 ASEAN Chairmanship provides an opportunity to pilot these coordination mechanisms through ASEAN-ADB-ECOSOC trilateral cooperation, establishing formal dialogue mechanisms with regular summit meetings and joint project development, focusing on policy areas where organizational mandates overlap – particularly sustainable development financing and climate change adaptation where ASEAN consensus is strongest – and creating knowledge-sharing initiatives that build institutional relationships extending beyond Malaysia's chairmanship period. This pilot approach allows for demonstrating reform benefits while building political momentum for broader institutional change, addressing the political will constraints identified by 90% of respondents as the primary implementation barrier. The proposed trilateral cooperation between ASEAN, ADB and ECOSOC appears particularly timely given ongoing trade policy volatility and shifting economic relationships in the Asia-Pacific region. Recent protectionist trade measures affecting various economies, including Asian trading partners, create an urgent context for strengthened regional coordination mechanisms that can help member states navigate economic uncertainty while maintaining multilateral engagement.

7. IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research identifies significant barriers to implementing ECOSOC representation reforms, with political will (90%) emerging as the primary obstacle, followed by member state disagreements (70%) and resource constraints (65%). These challenges reflect fundamental political economy dynamics in international institutional change, where existing power holders benefit from current arrangements and resist changes that might dilute their influence.

7.1 Political Economy of Reform

To successfully implementing the proposed reforms requires a strategic approach that frames change as enhancing rather than threatening existing members' interests, emphasizing ECOSOC's declining relevance without reform to create incentives for change among stakeholders concerned about institutional marginalization. Coalition building becomes crucial, requiring partnerships between reform beneficiaries and current power holders, with middle powers and emerging economies playing bridging roles given their stakes in both institutional stability and representation equity. Representation reforms are not about diminishing any region's influence but about preventing ECOSOC's collective irrelevance. When the APG – representing 60% of global population and 40% of GDP – perceives systematic underrepresentation, states pursue alternative venues. WEOG and other regional groupings benefit from a legitimate and effective ECOSOC that maintains its coordinating role rather than a marginalized ECOSOC that loses policy influence to institutions where they have less voice.

7.2 Resource and Capacity Constraints

Resource and capacity constraints present additional implementation challenges. Reform initiatives require long-term funding commitments that cannot depend solely on voluntary contributions from beneficiary states. Integration with existing UN reform funding mechanisms and development assistance programs could provide more stable resource bases. Enhanced representation also demands institutional capacity development within both member states and ECOSOC secretariat structures, including personnel training, systems development and procedural adaptation to accommodate more diverse participation.

7.3 Timeline and Sequencing

Digital technologies offer opportunities to reduce participation costs while improving coordination quality, but digital divides among member states require careful attention to ensure technology solutions do not exacerbate existing inequities. Realistic implementation requires carefully sequenced initiatives: short-term pilot coordination projects during Malaysia's ASEAN Chairmanship and immediate seat reallocation adjustments; medium-term development and testing of resource

equalization mechanisms; and long-term comprehensive structural reforms with permanent funding mechanisms for participation support. This phased approach allows for demonstration of benefits before requiring formal institutional changes, building momentum while addressing the political economy constraints that make wholesale reform difficult.

8. CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that ECOSOC's current membership structure faces a fundamental legitimacy crisis in ensuring fair and equitable representation of global regions and socioeconomic diversity. With only 6.9% of stakeholders rating the current regional distribution as "Very Fair" and LDCs and SIDS- the constituencies most needing effective international coordination – facing the greatest representation challenges (43.2% and 26.1% respectively), ECOSOC confronts a paradox where those most affected by global economic decisions have the least influence over institutions designed to address their concerns.

The findings reveal that representation challenges extend far beyond seat allocations to fundamental questions about how economic capabilities translate into institutional influence. Resource disparities, particularly political power dynamics (43.2%) and financial constraints (34.1%) enable advanced economies to leverage their economic capabilities into disproportionate institutional influence, while formal representation equality masks substantial participation inequalities. This legitimacy deficit is particularly problematic given the rise of alternative multilateral arrangements – including BRICS, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and strengthened regional organizations – that offer developing nations greater voice and more equitable decision-making processes. For Asian political economy specifically, the research reveals how the region's diversity spanning from least developed countries to advanced economies, combined with significant political and cultural differences, creates collective action challenges that more cohesive regional groups do not face. Despite representing over half the global population and increasingly significant economic weight, Asian states may be systematically disadvantaged by coordination challenges, with only ASEAN and the PIF maintaining consistent positions within the fragmented APG.

The proposed three-pillar reform approach – structural recalibration through development-based representation criteria, procedural support through resource equalization mechanisms and coordination enhancement through formalized regional consultations – offers concrete policy directions that address both immediate inequities and longer-term institutional adaptation needs. Malaysia's 2025 ASEAN Chairmanship presents a strategic opportunity to pilot these coordination mechanisms through ASEAN-ADB-ECOSOC trilateral cooperation, potentially demonstrating how reformed multilateral mechanisms can remain relevant alongside emerging alternative arrangements. However, implementation faces significant political economy constraints, with political will (90%) and member state disagreements (70%) representing primary barriers. Success requires framing reforms as enhancing rather than threatening existing members' interests while building coalitions between reform beneficiaries and current power holders. The urgency of these reforms extends beyond institutional improvement to the credibility of multilateral cooperation itself – without meaningful adaptation to represent contemporary realities, traditional institutions risk further marginalization as states pursue development objectives through alternative mechanisms.

The research contributes systematic empirical evidence of representation gaps in global economic governance while providing policy frameworks for institutional adaptation. In an era of rising nationalism and fragmented global governance, demonstrating that international institutions can evolve to reflect changing power distributions becomes crucial for maintaining the cooperative frameworks necessary to address shared global challenges. ECOSOC's ability to implement meaningful representation reforms may serve as a test case for whether traditional multilateral institutions can adapt to 21st-century realities or will continue losing relevance to more nimble alternatives that better reflect contemporary economic and political dynamics.

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ATTACHMENT 1

Cover Note

Research Questionnaire on the United Nations Economic And Social Council (ECOSOC)'s Membership Structure and Equitable Regional Representation

Dear Sir/Madame/Participant,

It is my distinct privilege to introduce myself. I am Nurul Syaza Azlisha, an Asian Development Bank (ADB) scholar from Malaysia and a Master of Public Policy (International Program) (MPP/IP) candidate at The University of Tokyo, Japan.

Currently, I am conducting research for my master's thesis examining "How Effectively Does the Current Membership Structure of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Ensure Fair and Equitable Representation of Global Regions and Socioeconomic Diversity?".

This questionnaire aims to gather valuable insights from stakeholders who may have experience with and/or knowledge of the work of the ECOSOC. It consists of 25 questions divided into six sections namely (A) Respondent Information; (B) Fairness of Current Structure; (C) Effectiveness of Representation; (D) Integration and Coordination; (E) Reform and Improvement; and (F) Regional Cooperation. The final section particularly focuses on Malaysia's current ASEAN Chairmanship in 2025 and potential ECOSOC-ADB engagement. It should take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.

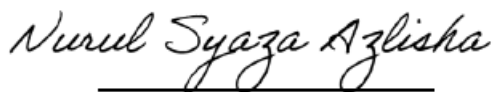
This survey is completely anonymous and conducted for academic research purposes only. While aggregated results may be shared with third parties, no personally identifiable information will be disclosed. All responses will be analyzed at a group level only to maintain confidentiality.

If you could spare a moment, I would greatly appreciate your participation in this questionnaire. The link is <https://forms.gle/E97S2HnbAXWi9Ax38>. Your responses will contribute significantly to understanding how the ECOSOC's membership structure impacts global representation and developing recommendations for enhancement. Your participation in this research is greatly appreciated. If you are not familiar with the work of the ECOSOC, no worries, you can browse about it via <https://ecosoc.un.org/en>. Feel free to share with others who might be interested!

For any queries, please contact me at nurulsyaza88@g.ecc.u-tokyo.ac.jp and/or mobile +818035595058.

Thank you for your time and valuable contribution.

Sincerely,



Master of Public Policy (International Program) (MPP/IP) Candidate
Graduate School of Public Policy, The University of Tokyo
Asian Development Bank (ADB) Scholar

Questionnaire

“How Effectively Does the Current Membership Structure of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Ensure Fair and Equitable Representation of Global Regions and Socioeconomic Diversity?”

Section A: Respondent Information

1. Which region are you from?
 - ☐ African States
 - ☐ Asia-Pacific States
 - ☐ Eastern European States
 - ☐ Latin American and Caribbean States
 - ☐ Western European and Other States
2. What is your professional background?
 - ☐ Diplomat/Government Official
 - ☐ Academic/Researcher
 - ☐ International Organization Professional
 - ☐ Private Sector Professional
 - ☐ Civil Society Organization Representative
 - ☐ Other (please specify): _____
3. How many years of experience do you have working with or studying UN-related matters?
 - ☐ Less than 5 years
 - ☐ 5-10 years
 - ☐ 11-15 years
 - ☐ More than 15 years
4. Have you directly participated in ECOSOC meetings or processes?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
5. What is your primary area of expertise in relation to ECOSOC's work? (Select one)
 - ☐ Economic Development
 - ☐ Social Development
 - ☐ Environmental Sustainability
 - ☐ Humanitarian Affairs
 - ☐ Public Administration
 - ☐ International Relations
 - ☐ Regional Cooperation
 - ☐ Elections/Candidatures
 - ☐ Other (please specify): _____

Section B: Fairness of Current Structure

6. How would you rate the fairness of the current regional distribution of ECOSOC seats? (The composition of seats is 14 African, 11 Asia-Pacific, 6 Eastern European, 10 Latin American/Caribbean and 13 Western European)
- ☐ Very Fair
 - ☐ Somewhat Fair
 - ☐ Neutral
 - ☐ Somewhat Unfair
 - ☐ Very Unfair
7. Does the three-year membership term adequately serve representation needs?
- ☐ Yes, it's optimal
 - ☐ No, it's too short
 - ☐ No, it's too long
 - ☐ Unsure
 - ☐ Other (please specify): _____
8. How effectively does the current election system promote fair representation?
- ☐ Very Effective
 - ☐ Somewhat Effective
 - ☐ Neutral
 - ☐ Somewhat Ineffective
 - ☐ Very Ineffective
9. What impact does the practice of having permanent United Nations Security Council (UNSC) members consistently in ECOSOC's decision-making balance?
- ☐ Positive
 - ☐ Somewhat Positive
 - ☐ No Impact
 - ☐ Somewhat Negative
 - ☐ Very Negative
10. To what extent does the current membership structure reflect contemporary global economic and socioeconomic realities?
Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 Completely
Please explain your rating: _____

Section C: Effectiveness of Representation

11. How effectively does the current membership structure represent different levels of economic development?
- ☐ Very Effective
 - ☐ Somewhat Effective
 - ☐ Neutral
 - ☐ Somewhat Ineffective
 - ☐ Very Ineffective
12. How effectively does the current Bureau system represent regional interests?
- ☐ Very Effective
 - ☐ Somewhat Effective
 - ☐ Neutral
 - ☐ Somewhat Ineffective
 - ☐ Very Ineffective
13. Which group face the greatest challenges in achieving effective representation?

- ☐ Least Developed Countries
- ☐ Small Island Developing States
- ☐ Landlocked Developing Countries
- ☐ Middle-Income Countries
- ☐ Emerging Economies
- ☐ Regional Economic Communities
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

14. What barrier most impact the effectiveness of regional representation?

- ☐ Financial Resources
- ☐ Technical Capacity
- ☐ Political Power Dynamics
- ☐ Geographic Location
- ☐ Language Barriers
- ☐ Digital Infrastructure
- ☐ Human Resources
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

15. How would you rate the effectiveness of ECOSOC's current working methods in promoting inclusive participation?

5 ▾

★ ▾

1

2

3

4

5

☆

☆

☆

☆

☆

Section D: Integration and Coordination

16. How effectively do regional commissions (Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)) support member state participation?

- ☐ Very Effective
- ☐ Somewhat Effective
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Somewhat Ineffective
- ☐ Very Ineffective

17. What mechanism would most improve regional coordination? (Select top 3)

- ☐ Regular Regional Consultations
- ☐ Enhanced Information Sharing
- ☐ Stronger Regional Secretariat Support
- ☐ Better Resource Pooling
- ☐ Improved Digital Collaboration Tools
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

Section E: Reform and Improvement

18. Which aspect of ECOSOC's structure most need reform?

- ☐ Regional Seat Distribution
- ☐ Term Lengths
- ☐ Election Procedures

- ☐ Decision-Making Processes
 - ☐ Voting Rights
 - ☐ Meeting Locations
 - ☐ Working Methods
 - ☐ Other (please specify): _____
19. What measures would strengthen participation from underrepresented regions? (Select all that apply)
- ☐ Financial Support for attendance at meetings
 - ☐ Technical Assistance for preparation and participation
 - ☐ Capacity Building Programs
 - ☐ Improved Communications Channel
 - ☐ Virtual Participation Options
 - ☐ Enhanced Voting Rights on Specific Issues
20. What impact does the location of meetings of the ECOSOC meetings have on representation?
- ☐ Significant positive impact
 - ☐ Moderate positive impact
 - ☐ No impact
 - ☐ Moderate negative impact
 - ☐ Significant negative impact
 - ☐ Depends on the type of meeting
 - ☐ Other (please specify): _____
21. What potential barriers might impede the implementation of reforms? (Select top 3)
- ☐ Political will
 - ☐ Resource constraints
 - ☐ Institutional resistance
 - ☐ Competing priority areas
 - ☐ Complex decision-making processes
 - ☐ Member state disagreements
 - ☐ Administrative challenges

Section F: Regional Cooperation (Malaysia's ASEAN Chairmanship 2025 and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) - ECOSOC Engagement)

22. How can Malaysia leverage its 2025 ASEAN Chairmanship to enhance ADB-ECOSOC cooperation? (Select all that apply)
- ☐ Facilitate regional development dialogues
 - ☐ Strengthen ASEAN-ADB-ECOSOC trilateral cooperation
 - ☐ Lead regional sustainable development initiatives
 - ☐ Promote ASEAN economic integration perspectives
 - ☐ Foster knowledge sharing between ADB and ECOSOC
 - ☐ Other (please specify): _____
23. Which ECOSOC platforms should Malaysia prioritize for ASEAN-ADB engagement during its chairmanship?
- ☐ High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
 - ☐ Financing for Development Forum
 - ☐ Development Cooperation Forum
 - ☐ Partnership Forum
 - ☐ ESCAP Regional Forums
 - ☐ Coordination Segment
 - ☐ Operational Activities Segment
 - ☐ Other (please specify): _____

24. How could Malaysia's ASEAN Chairmanship facilitate stronger ADB participation in ECOSOC's regional development work? (Select all that apply)
- ☐ Coordinate ASEAN-ADB development initiatives
 - ☐ Lead regional SDG implementation efforts
 - ☐ Promote Southeast Asian financing solutions
 - ☐ Enhance regional data collection and analysis
 - ☐ Strengthen ASEAN-ESCAP-ADB collaboration
 - ☐ Support capacity building programs
 - ☐ Champion regional infrastructure development
25. What long term outcomes should Malaysia prioritize to ensure sustainable ASEAN-ECOSOC-ADB collaboration beyond its 2025 Chairmanship? (Select all that apply)
- ☐ Sustainable regional development fund
 - ☐ Long-term capacity building programs
 - ☐ Regional innovation and research centers
 - ☐ Formalized multi-stakeholder partnerships
 - ☐ Regular regional development reviews
 - ☐ Other (please specify): _____

ATTACHMENT 2

Cover Note

Interview Questions on the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)'s Membership Structure and Equitable Regional Representation

Dear Sir/Madame/Participant,

It is my distinct privilege to introduce myself. I am Nurul Syaza Azlisha, an Asian Development Bank (ADB) scholar from Malaysia and a Master of Public Policy (International Program) (MPP/IP) candidate at The University of Tokyo, Japan.

Currently, I am conducting research for my master's thesis examining "How Effectively Does the Current Membership Structure of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Ensure Fair and Equitable Representation of Global Regions and Socioeconomic Diversity?".

This interview aims to gather valuable insights from stakeholder(s) who may have experience with and/or knowledge of the work of the ECOSOC. It consists of 5 questions and takes approximately 45-60 minutes to complete.

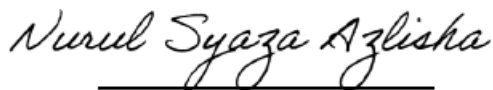
This interview is completely anonymous and conducted for academic research purposes only. While aggregated results may be shared with third parties, no personally identifiable information will be disclosed. All responses will be analyzed at a group level only to maintain confidentiality.

Your responses will contribute significantly to understanding how the ECOSOC's membership structure impacts global representation and developing recommendations for enhancement. Your participation in this research is greatly appreciated.

For any queries, please contact me at nurulsyaza88@g.ecc.u-tokyo.ac.jp and/or mobile +818035595058.

Thank you for your time and valuable contribution.

Sincerely,



Master of Public Policy (International Program) (MPP/IP) Candidate
Graduate School of Public Policy
The University of Tokyo
Asian Development Bank (ADB) Scholar

Thesis Topic

“How Effectively Does the Current Membership Structure of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Ensure Fair and Equitable Representation of Global Regions and Socioeconomic Diversity?”

Interview Questions

1. Given the evolving global economic landscape and shifting power dynamics, how would you assess ECOSOC's current membership structure in terms of ensuring equitable regional representation?
2. How do ECOSOC's current institutional mechanisms affect the quality and effectiveness of regional representation, particularly for advance/developing/ smaller nations and island states?
3. What specific reforms would be most impactful in enhancing ECOSOC's representation structure, and what challenges might arise in implementing these changes?
4. How can Malaysia strategically utilize its 2025 ASEAN Chairmanship to strengthen the ASEAN-ADB-ECOSOC relationship and enhance regional development cooperation?
5. Looking ahead, what systemic changes are needed to ensure ECOSOC remains relevant and effective in promoting equitable regional representation while advancing sustainable development goals?

AUTHOR'S DECLARATIONS AND ESSENTIAL ETHICAL COMPLIANCES

Author's Contributions (in accordance with ICMJE criteria for authorship)

This article is 100% contributed by the sole author. She conceived and designed the research or analysis, collected the data, contributed to data analysis & interpretation, wrote the article, performed critical revision of the article/paper, edited the article, and supervised and administered the field work.

Funding

No funding was available for the research conducted for and writing of this paper. Therefore, acknowledging any support agency is not applicable in case of this research or the written work. However, informal support of institutional supervisors, colleagues and respondents is duly acknowledged.

Research involving human bodies or organs or tissues (Helsinki Declaration)

The author(s) solemnly declare(s) that this research has not involved any human subject (body or organs) for experimentation. It was not a clinical research. The contexts of human population/participation were only indirectly covered through literature review. Therefore, an Ethical Clearance (from a Committee or Authority) or ethical obligation of Helsinki Declaration does not apply in cases of this study or written work.

Research involving animals (ARRIVE Checklist)

The author(s) solemnly declare(s) that this research has not involved any animal subject (body or organs) for experimentation. The research was not based on laboratory experiment involving any kind of animal. Some contexts of animals are also indirectly covered through literature review. Therefore, an Ethical Clearance (from a Committee or Authority) does not apply in cases of this study or written work.

Research on Indigenous Peoples and/or Traditional Knowledge

The author(s) solemnly declare(s) that this research has not involved Indigenous Peoples as participants or respondents, with the documentation of their Indigenous Knowledge. Some other contexts, if any, of Indigenous Peoples or Indigenous Knowledge are only indirectly covered through literature review. An Ethical Clearance 'to conduct research on indigenous peoples' Indigenous knowledge is also not relevant. Therefore, an Ethical Clearance (from a Committee or Authority) or prior informed consent (PIC) of the respondents or Self-Declaration in this regard does not apply in cases of this study or written work.

Research involving Plants

The author(s) solemnly declare(s) that this research has not involved the plants for experiment or field studies. The contexts of plants were only indirectly covered through literature review. Thus, during this research the author(s) obeyed the principles of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Convention on the Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

(Optional) Research Involving Local Community Participants (Non-Indigenous)

The author(s) solemnly declare(s) that this research has not involved local community participants or respondents belonging to non-Indigenous peoples. This study did not involve any child in any form directly. The contexts of different humans, people, populations, men/women/children and ethnic people are also indirectly covered through literature review. Therefore, an Ethical Clearance (from a Committee or Authority) and prior informed consent (PIC) of the respondents in this regard are NOT appended.

(Optional) PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses)

The author(s) has/have NOT complied with PRISMA standards. It is not relevant in case of this study or written work.

Competing Interests/Conflict of Interest

Author(s) has/have no competing financial, professional, or personal interests from other parties or in publishing this manuscript. There is no conflict of interest with the publisher or the editorial team or the reviewers.

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